

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 005652

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IZ TU PHUM

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AMBASSADOR, DEPUTY P.M. SAHIN DISCUSS IRAQ, MINORITY FOUNDATIONS

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman. Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In his introductory call on Deputy P.M. Mehmet Ali Sahin, the Ambassador underscored the importance of U.S.-Turkey relations; said that Turkey could play an important positive role in Iraq; and raised concerns about minority foundations. Sahin said the GOT believes it can contribute to a stable, prosperous Iraq. On minority foundations, Sahin acknowledged that implementation of existing legislation is what will improve the situation of the foundations and underscored that the GOT is committed to resolving property claims issues. End summary.

Iraq

¶2. (C) In a Sept. 3 initial call by the Ambassador, Deputy P.M. Sahin opened the discussion by seeking the Ambassador's initial views of Turkey. The Ambassador stressed that Turkey and the U.S. share strategic goals in the region, including in Iraq, and that Turkey's success as a democracy will have profound effects for Muslim countries everywhere.

¶3. (C) In response, Sahin repeatedly emphasized the importance a stable Iraq has for the entire region. Stability is in Turkey's interests, Sahin said, and "we are cooperating with U.S. to achieve this." Sahin downplayed the views of some Turks that the situation in Iraq is deteriorating and that Turkey should not become involved. Turkey can contribute positively to establishing a stable and prosperous Iraq. "Once we explain ourselves to the public, the Turkish people will be behind us." The GOT believes the U.S. is in Iraq for the right reasons, he claimed.

Minority Foundations

¶4. (C) The Ambassador then raised minority foundations in Turkey, which are part of Sahin's wide-ranging portfolio. Noting the GOT's commitment to improve the situation of the foundations, the Ambassador recommended that the GOT focus on property issues. Working hard to address the concerns of minority foundations, particularly those of the Ecumenical Patriarch, will not only improve Turkey's standing as a democracy but will also redound to the GOT's benefit with the broader American public, including Representatives in Congress.

¶5. (C) Sahin claimed that the GOT is committed to improving the situation of the foundations both for Turkey's own democratic development and for Turkey's EU bid. He meets with representatives of the foundations frequently to discuss their problems and concerns. The GOT is now working on implementing recently passed legislation that will help resolve property claims issues. The head of the foundations general directorate has prepared a progress report on implementation, Sahin said. Although Sahin admitted he had not yet read the report, he asserted that the GOT wants implementation and if there are problems, it will correct them. Sahin summarized the GOT approach in this way: "we ask ourselves: if we are living in a foreign country, how would we want to be treated?" In any case, "these people are Turkish citizens; we can't discriminate against them."

Bio Note

¶6. (C) Sahin has been a long-time Embassy contact as an Istanbul M.P. from AK predecessor parties, Refah and Fazilet, and earlier as an Istanbul political bigwig (he served briefly as mayor of conservative Fatih district and later was

Refah's party boss for Istanbul in 1994). He has been an open, thoughtful interlocutor -- and one not prone to blustering or hyperbole. Our contacts say Sahin has a certain entree to P.M. Erdogan. Their relationship likely grew out of their time working together in Istanbul, where Erdogan served as mayor 1994-1998.

EDELMAN